

Study prep: What does it MEAN?

Bible Study Group Leaders Training – 1C

28 July 2018 [Bible College South Australia]

SMALL GROUP LEADER TRAINING – UNIT 1C - Study Prep – What does it MEAN?

July 2018



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Introduction

- Strand 1 so far:
 - o The purpose of small groups
 - Bible and prayer
 - Care for each other
 - Outreach and service
 - o Discipleship in small groups
 - Taking the next step with Jesus
- In all this, recognising the centrality of the Bible to inform us and transform us.

On understanding the Bible and teaching it to others...

1Thessalonians 2:13 And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe.

2Timothy. 3:14-17 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Isaiah. 55:10-11 As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

1 Corinthians 2:11-12 For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us.

Two key principles:

We need to believe the Bible not just understand the Bible

We are seeking to work with the Bible and letting the Bible work on us.

See also

Psalm 1, 19, 119

Romans 15:4

1 Corinthians 10:1-11

Hebrews 4:12-13

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COMA (but saving the A for next session)

Picture a detective, or a doctor, or a motor vehicle mechanic. Collecting as much data as possible, seeking not to overlook important details, looking for the unexpected, but not failing to see the obvious. But where all of these tasks involve working 'on' the object of investigation, we then let the object of our investigation subject us to investigation. We're not investigating it to fix the problem in it, we're investigating it to fix the problem in us.

Context

If we don't do this we forget that we weren't the original audience, or we forget that we are still part of its intended audience. As you work through this, keep asking yourself 'so what?'

- The literary context (how does it fit as a piece of writing)
 - o Passage within the book
 - o Passage within its genre
- The situational context (how does it fit as a piece of communication)
 - o From whom, to whom, under what circumstances
 - o Cultural particularities of note
- The theological context (how does it fit as part of God making Jesus known)
 - o Biblical theology
 - o Salvation history

Observation

This is all about reading closely so we read the meaning out from the text and not import our own meaning into the text.

- What questions does it raise - for you? For your group?
- How does it fit together?
 - o Look for connecting words (and, also, furthermore)
 - o Look for contrasting words (but, yet, however)
 - o Look for consequence words (therefore, because, since, so that, in order that)
 - o Look for chronology words (before, after, then, when, next)
- What might be key words or concepts?
 - o Look for jargon words, loaded words, repeated words, surprising words.
- What response does the passage seem to call for?
 - o Look for different types of speech that call for a response (instruction, encouragement, request, command)

Meaning

To understand what a passage means we need to consider what it meant to the original audience and how it relates to Christ.

- Review what you observed about context and consider how your observations relate to that.
 - o Within the purpose of the book
 - o Within the story of the Bible (Biblical theology)
 - o Within the themes of the Bible (systematic theology)
- Identify the big idea in the passage that all the other ideas serve to support. Picture a roof held up by a series of columns. The reason for having the columns is to support the roof. Work out which bit is the roof - the Big Idea - that is the main point of the passage.
- Ideas change things, so what is the change that this passage is seeking

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A few (hopefully) helpful notes:

1 - Genre

C.S Lewis wrote *'the first qualification for judging any piece of workmanship from a corkscrew to a cathedral is to know what it is – what it was intended to do and how it is meant to be used.'* We tend to try and read a lot of the Bible like we read a text book, or at least like we might read one of the epistles (letters). But poetry / psalms isn't / aren't a letter. It doesn't just convey information because it's meant to engage the emotions. The historical narratives are not going to tell a story in the same way prophetic visions do. Each genre is identified by its distinct literary features that can be very helpful in guiding our interpretation:¹

- **Apocalyptic** — Images of God, judgment, hope and spiritual reality
- **Epistle** — arguments and relationships
- **Gospel** — Jesus and his identity, priorities, death and resurrection
- **History** — Origin and progression of God's people
- **Law** — Requirements for living in relation to God, in certain time periods
- **Narrative** — Plot and characterisation
- **Parable** — Metaphor and simile
- **Poetry** — Emotional response and the object that invoked the emotion
- **Prophecy / Revelation** — What God intends to do and why
- **Prayer** — God's people communicating with Him
- **Sermon** — Proving, explaining or exhorting
- **Wisdom** — How to live well in the world

2 - Biblical Theology

When considering the context of the passage, consider the progressive sweep of **BIBLICAL THEOLOGY** – the story of God's saving work in the world from Genesis all the way through to Revelation. **Where the passage sits in this plot line** will influence how it should be understood. For example, OT passages regarding the promised land are seen in fresh perspective in the light of the NT. Some of the questions you may want to ask of the text are:

- How does this passage fit with the whole of the Bible up to now?
 - Is this passage quoted elsewhere in the Bible or does it quote another passage?
 - What major Biblical themes are dealt with in this passage and how do they fit into the wider context of the Bible?
 - Does the passage contain fulfilment of promises (from the Bible books before it) or raise promises that look forward to their future fulfilment?
- How does this passage fit into the purposes of God in Jesus Christ (Remember to look forward in the Bible because the Bible has a purpose, a direction and a conclusion)?
 - Does the passage contain promises that are fulfilled later (in Christ)?
 - Where does the passage fit into God's saving work in history?
 - What does the passage say about who Jesus is and the purpose of His coming?

¹ <http://www.csl.org.uk/>

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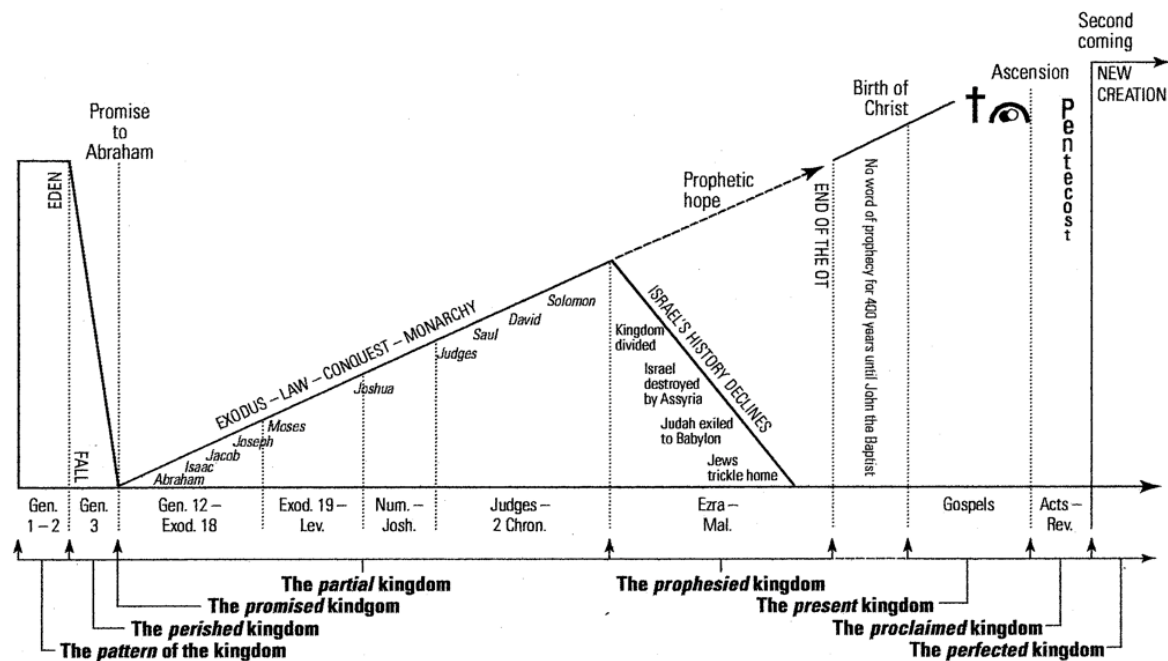


Figure 46. God's big picture

3 - Systematic Theology

Consider also the breadth of **SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY** – God is consistent in His character and His will for human living. So no passage of scripture can be interpreted in a way that contradicts the wider testimony of scripture. Therefore, when we come to a passage that includes a comment on slavery, for example, it needs to be understood in the breadth of what the Bible teaches about a range of topics: human dignity; love for neighbours; respect for authority; human governance; justice; not to mention the promise of ultimate justice and restoration in the new creation.

Two questions might be useful to bear in mind:

- How does the context of this passage help me see its meaning more clearly? (Think context of the book, biblical theology, and particularly the cross)
- How does the **GOSPEL** framework help me in understanding this passage? (Consider the key themes of a gospel outline: creation, fall and sin, judgement, the cross, forgiveness, Christ's present rule and the gift of the Spirit, Christ's future return and the final judgement and renewal of all things)

And remember that most of us think in spirals, not straight lines. You should expect that you will be half way through your observation when you realise you need to reconsider something about the context. Or you'll be working on how it fits with biblical theology when you realise there is a key word repeated that you'd not noticed before. That's OK. In fact, it is better than OK, it is the really exciting reality that we will never exhaust God and his revelation to us in his word!

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Exercise:

Phil 1:27-2:13

Use each step to consider 'What is the big idea?'

PRAY

Your thoughts

Question/tool that might be useful

Context:

Observation:

Meaning:

Summarise the CENTRAL IDEA in **one sentence**: *At the end of the study, I want the group to understand...*

Ask yourself: in the wider context of the Bible, what is this passage designed to **do**? *At the end of the study, I want the group to change...*

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^{1:27} Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel ²⁸ without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. ²⁹ For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, ³⁰ since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

^{2:1} Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

⁶ Who, being in very nature God,
 did not consider equality with God something
 to be used to his own advantage;
⁷ rather, he made himself nothing
 by taking the very nature of a servant,
 being made in human likeness.
⁸ And being found in appearance as a man,
 he humbled himself
 by becoming obedient to death—
 even death on a cross!
⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
 and gave him the name that is above every
 name,
¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
 in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is
 Lord,
 to the glory of God the Father.

¹² Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

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Useful Books and Resources

Useful for background and context:

The New Bible Dictionary. Marshall, Millard, Packer and Wiseman (eds). Apollos, 1996

How to Read the Bible For All It's Worth. Fee and Stuart, Zondervan 2003

How to Read the Bible Book by Book. Fee and Stuart. Zondervan, 2014

Postcard from Palestine. Andrew Reid. Matthias Media, 1997 (available as a PDF eBook for \$5 from matthiasmedia.com.au)

Zondervan Encyclopaedia of the Bible. Zondervan, 2009 (The first edition of this can be accessed online at <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/encyclopedia-of-the-bible/toc>)

Useful for Biblical Theology:

God's Big Picture. Vaughan Roberts. IVP, 2009

According to Plan. Goldsworthy. IVP, 1991

Useful for Systematic Theology:

Know the Truth. Milne. IVP, 2009

Evangelical Dictionary of Theology. Elwell. Baker, 2001

Useful for help with the specific passage you're in:

The New Bible Commentary. Carson, Frances, Motyer and Wenham. Apollos, 1994.

The Tyndale Bible Commentary. (multiple volumes, accessible level)

The IVP New Testament Commentary Series. (multiple volumes, accessible level) available online at <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/ivp-nt/toc/>

Useful for methods of studying the Bible and leading groups

One-to-One Bible Reading. David Helm. Mathias Media, 2011

Growth Groups: A Training Course in How to Lead Small Groups. Colin Marshall. Matthias Media, 1995

Leading Better Bible Studies – Essential Skills for Effective Small Groups. Karen and Rod Morris. Aquila Press, 2008